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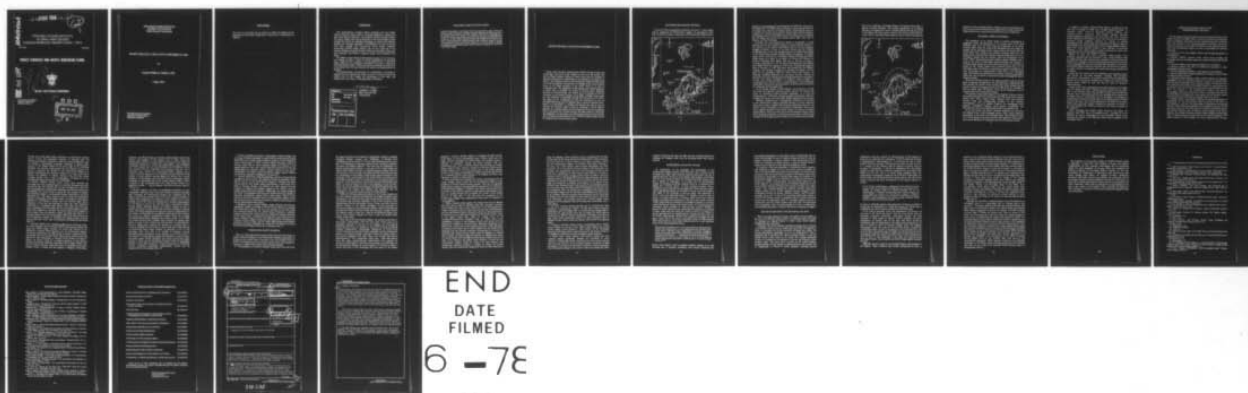
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## SOVIET STRATEGY AND NATO'S NORTHERN FLANK

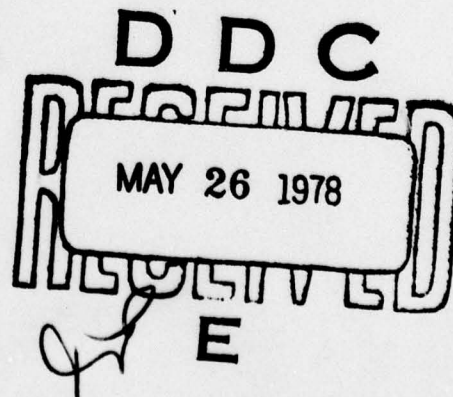
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**STRATEGIC STUDIES INSTITUTE  
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**SOVIET STRATEGY AND NATO'S NORTHERN FLANK**

**by**

**Captain William K. Sullivan, USN**

**1 May 1978**

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## FOREWORD

This memorandum considers Soviet expansion into the Nordic region which the author views as eventually intended to isolate that area from Western influence and eradicate NATO's Northern Flank. The author affirms that such an alteration of the Nordic balance would provide the Soviets the peripheral advantage of access to the harbors, airfields and strategic geography of Scandinavia in order to project both their strategic and conventional forces further westward, threatening NATO's logistic lifelines. He sees the resolution of the security problems along the Northern Flank as essentially a naval issue and concludes that NATO's response should come primarily from afloat.

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This memorandum was prepared as a contribution to the field of national security research and study. As such, it does not reflect the official view of the College, the Department of the Navy, the Department of the Army, or the Department of Defense.

*Robert G. Yerks*

**ROBERT G. YERKS**  
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## **SOVIET STRATEGY AND NATO'S NORTHERN FLANK**

Lately, much has been written about NATO's Northern Flank and its strategic value both to the Alliance as well as to the Soviets. The recent massive military buildup of Soviet forces and new facilities in this area underscores its importance to the Kremlin as a separate war theater. The relatively small and environmentally hostile Kola Peninsula now hosts the greatest concentration of Russian naval, ground, and air power to be found anywhere in the Soviet Union in an area of comparable size. The magnitude of the buildup seems hardly defensive in nature and is probably not aimed at Norway alone. Militarily deterred in Central Europe, the Soviets may be reaching around the continent to put primary pressure on its edges. If Russia cannot bully her way militarily or politically through the Central Front of NATO, she might just be considering the next best alternative—an end run through Scandinavia and the adjacent seas to reach the Atlantic Ocean. Hence, it is appropriate to examine the reasons why such an end run through this northern region would be tempting to Soviet military planners as a possible military thrust independent of any accompanying Soviet movement into Central Europe. We shall, therefore, determine the significance of this region from the Russian viewpoint and examine why a limited and isolated attack into NATO's Northern Flank would be a high priority Soviet military option.



## NORTHWESTERN REGION DEFINED

From the Soviet geographical perspective, the area of concern might well be designated the Northwestern Region. In geographical terms (Fig. 1) and for purposes of discussion, the Northwestern Region here is



Figure 1



defined as encompassing the Kola Peninsula; the White Sea; that part of the USSR west of the White Sea Canal System connecting with the Gulf of Finland; the countries of Finland, Sweden (including the island of Gotland), and Norway (including Jan Mayen Island and the Svalbard Archipelago); and the surrounding waters of the Barents Sea, Greenland Sea, Norwegian Sea, North Sea, Danish Straits, Baltic Sea, Gulf of Bothnia, and Gulf of Finland.

In Soviet eyes this Northwestern Region is presumably a crucial strategic factor in the East/West balance of power equation. Seizure of key territory by the Soviets would likely result in the Nordic balance swinging decisively in favor of the East. Sweden and the Svalbard Archipelago may be the only questionmarks in probable Soviet designs on the Northwestern Region. Russian military occupation of Svalbard might further intensify the worldwide political backlash the Soviets would accept as a result of an attack on Norway and Finland, for Svalbard (including Bear Island, half way to Norway) is open to economic exploitation to the 40 nations (including the United States and USSR) which were signators to the Treaty of Spitsbergen signed in Paris on February 9, 1920. This treaty also specifies that the Svalbard complex, even though recognized as sovereign Norwegian territory, shall not be militarized. Only the Soviet Union and Norway are presently exploiting Svalbard's rich coal mines; however, offshore oil exploration has been attempted by several international oil companies.<sup>1</sup> In any case Soviet occupation of Svalbard would probably be unnecessary since Western lines of communication to the Archipelago could easily be severed by the interposition of Soviet naval forces across the Greenland and Norwegian Seas.

As for Sweden, Russia, in all probability, would hesitate to invade this small but relatively powerful neutral. Instead, the Soviets may count on achieving eventual political dominance, or at least the "Finlandization" of Sweden, through complete encirclement, therefore isolating the Swedes from their basic Western influences and interests.

Although considered part of Scandinavia, Denmark is not included in the Northwestern Region, primarily because it is more associated with actions within or against Central Europe. Denmark is also the only Nordic country belonging to the European Community.<sup>2</sup> Hence, any action against Denmark would likely involve an attack in mainland Central Europe. Such is not the case in the Northwestern Region, where Soviet flanking movements of the land areas cited above could be made through the Norwegian and North Seas on the northwest and the Baltic

Sea on the southeast, eventually joining at the Danish Straits (Fig. 2) without invading Denmark. The strategic significance of occupying Denmark is recognized as a factor in having full and unhindered control of the Baltic exit choke point; however, the Soviets would hold the trump card for exit and entrance rights by virtue of their overwhelming

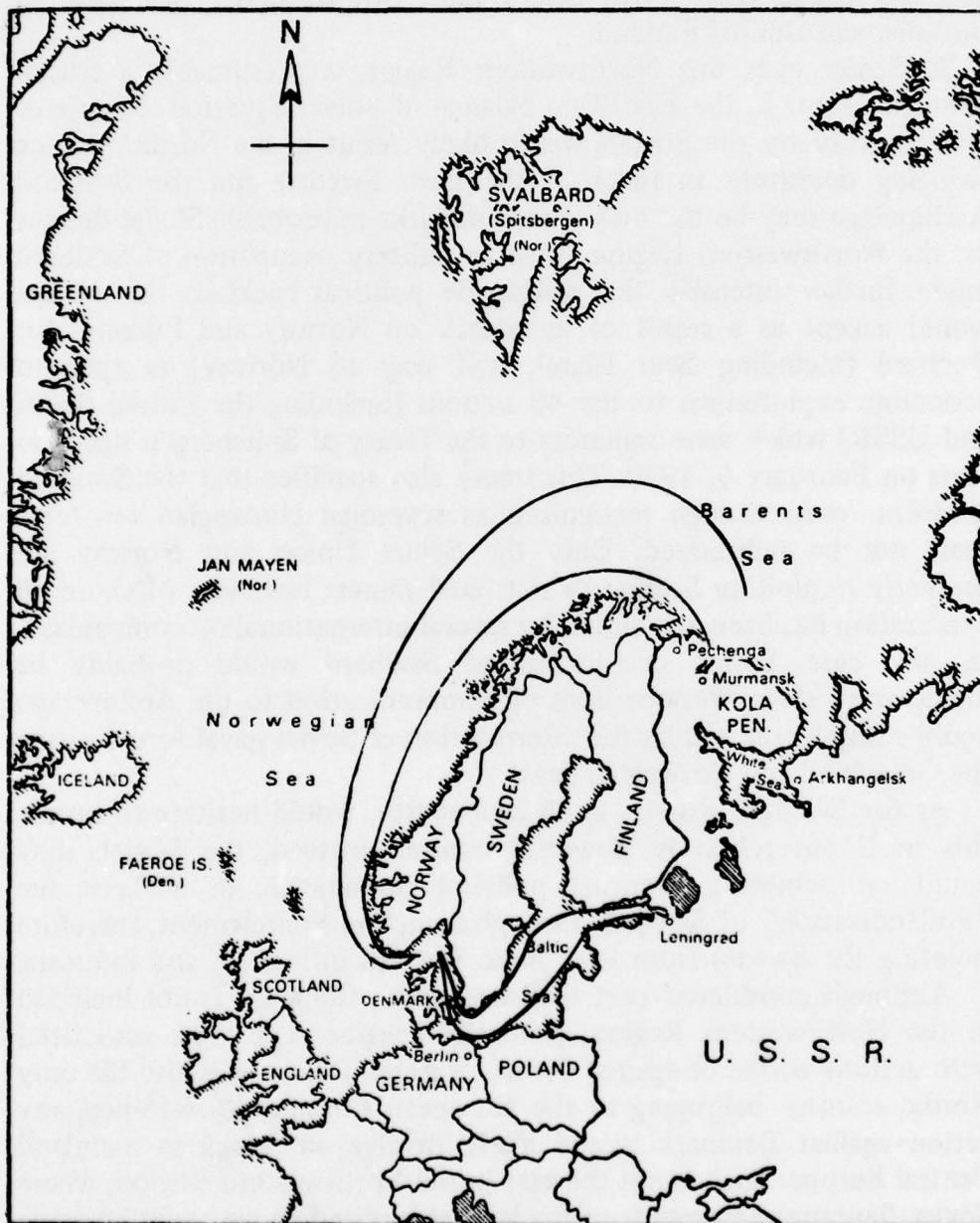


Figure 2

presence if they occupied Norway, Finland, and the surrounding seas. This control would be reinforced through their use of East German and Polish naval forces to protect the southern littoral of the Baltic Sea.

### REGIONAL THREAT REVIEWED

The magnitude of the Soviet threat in Northern Scandinavia is staggering. Along 100 kilometers of the ice-free coast of the Kola Peninsula there are some 800 ships and submarines of the Soviet Northern Fleet which are based in the Murmansk area and utilize the passages off the Norwegian coast to gain access to the oceans. With the Soviet Baltic Fleet acting as the southern maritime flank force, the Russians have extended their maritime forward deployment line out to Greenland, Iceland and the Faeroes. With the development of the Soviet SS-N-8 Submarine-Launched Ballistic Missile (SLBM), with a range in the order of 4,500 miles, Soviet submarines (in addition to covering targets within the entire NATO land mass) can now strike at targets in the United States from protected waters close to the Norwegian coast. Any Western counteraction against this SLBM threat must, of necessity, be concentrated on areas close to the Norwegian coast. This threat has transformed the northern maritime geographical region into one not merely of important transit and passage but also of potential conflict.

The Soviet Northern Fleet is the most powerful of all four Soviet fleets. Its greatest strength lies in its 180 submarines. Additionally this fleet includes 50 percent of the overall Soviet cruiser strength and 60 percent of Soviet oceangoing escorts and ASW forces. In combination with the Baltic Fleet, 70 percent of the Soviet submarine force is concentrated in the Northwestern Region.

The primary naval aviation assets of the Northern Fleet are entirely shore-based (though KA-25 helicopters and YAK-36 aircraft are carried aboard some Soviet surface units). Northern Fleet naval aviation operates long- and medium-range bombers in the maritime reconnaissance role and medium bombers for antishipping strike missions. Land-based maritime patrol aircraft, amphibians, and helicopters are used in an antisubmarine/ASW reconnaissance role.

As for land forces, the Soviet command maintains one motorized rifle division close to the Norwegian border, with a second deployed immediately to the south of the Finnish border. These divisions consist of one tank regiment and three motorized rifle regiments, with a greater than normal allowance of amphibious and snow-movement vehicles.



In addition, a brigade of Soviet Naval Infantry is deployed in the area with a strength of 2,000 men, 30 light amphibious tanks, 10 medium tanks, armored personnel carriers, artillery, and multiple-rocket launchers. This brigade regularly practices assault/amphibious landings in the Kola area and, when exercises involve additional Soviet infantry forces, the latter forces are moved in merchant marine freighters followed by transfer to landing ships/landing craft. Reinforcing these infantry/naval infantry units are five divisions from the southern areas of the Leningrad Military District (MD). One Soviet airborne division is also stationed on the Kola Peninsula, a force which could be further reinforced by three more divisions flown in from other Military Districts.

Within 10 days, the Soviet command could commit 12-14 divisions—compared with the elements of only 3 NATO divisions. This is possible because their reinforcement capability is being continuously improved by expanded road and rail links between Kola, the rear areas of the Leningrad MD and even the Baltic MD. Integration of the Soviet and Finnish railway networks would also give the Soviets the capacity to transit a further 12 divisions and commit them along a westerly axis of advance.

Soviet Air Force units in the area maintain an air strength of about 300 aircraft on the Kola Peninsula, including 100 all-weather interceptors, 100 bombers, 20 medium transports and 60 helicopters. Sixteen of the local Soviet airfields have runways in excess of 2,000 meters (about 6,600 ft.) and can thus be used for flying in reinforcements.<sup>3</sup>

Aware of the severe geographical constraints imposed by the Baltic Sea, the Soviets have been transferring more vessels from the Baltic Fleet to the Northern Fleet, some through the White Sea Canal System. However, the 35 submarines and 60 major warships which remain with the Baltic Fleet are a formidable force in this Region, considering the supplementary Warsaw Pact naval assets of the Baltic nations of Poland and East Germany. Also of great importance in the Baltic are the major Soviet naval repair and support facilities that represent two-thirds of the repair facilities that would be needed for their fleets to operate in the Atlantic.<sup>4</sup>

When examining the massive Soviet forces in this region, the question begs "Why such a formidable force?" Certainly, it is not defensive in nature, considering the only immediate military force opposing the Soviets is the 400-man frontier patrol company of the Norwegian Army.<sup>5</sup>



## STRATEGIC SIGNIFICANCE OF THE NORTHWESTERN THEATER

The Norwegian, North, and Barents Seas lie between the bases of the Soviet Northern and Baltic Fleets. Control of the Nordic sea and land areas is essential for these fleets to enjoy unhindered access to and from open seas. Because of its natural geographic constraints, the Soviet Union, in the event of war with the Western powers, may first want to secure the Northwestern Region in order to accomplish the following objectives:

- obtain access to the airfields, harbors, and strategic geography of Scandinavia;<sup>6</sup>
- prevent NATO's aircraft carrier forces from entering the Norwegian Sea and attacking targets in the Kola Peninsula with tactical aircraft;
- intercept sealift forces resupplying allied forces in Europe;
- protect, support, and carry out amphibious operations to other strategically important areas;
- prevent amphibious assaults or raids against northern Russia;
- prevent NATO from using Scandinavian countries as forward bases for allied air and sea forces;<sup>7</sup>

• maximize Soviet strategic ballistic missile offensive and defensive capabilities, since the Northeast Atlantic is the key to mutual Soviet and American vulnerability from strategic missiles. The shortest route for exchange of intercontinental missiles between the superpowers is an extension of the great circle route from Canada and Greenland in the West, via Iceland, to the Scandinavian countries and return.<sup>8</sup> Accordingly, with these objectives in mind, it is fitting to address each in detail before examining other very cogent, but less obvious, reasons which would tempt the Soviets to initially attack in the north.

• Obtain access to the airfields, harbors, and strategic geography of Scandinavia. In the Northwestern Region, control of the seas is a prerequisite for control of the land masses of Scandinavia. Recognizing this, the Soviet Union has gradually been extending its pattern of naval operations from the fleet base areas of the Baltic and Barents Seas to the forward defense zone of Western naval strategy in the North Atlantic, the strategic Greenland-Iceland-United Kingdom (GIUK) Gap (Fig. 3), which covers the access routes to and from the Atlantic.<sup>9</sup> The eastern littoral of this extended sea area is delineated by Norway.



Figure 3

Northern Norway's eight major airfields, many built with NATO funds, are of major importance in this alignment. "In Western hands, they threaten Soviet air support in any conflict in the vicinity of the GIUK Gap, but, in Soviet hands, they could greatly extend the reach of Russian land-based air in the Atlantic, perhaps with decisive results."<sup>10</sup> For example, consider the threat of the Soviet Backfire bomber, particularly to US naval forces. From bases near Murmansk, the Backfire's unrefueled subsonic combat radius is 2,650 nautical miles, allowing it to reach ships transiting the mid-Atlantic from the United States to Europe.<sup>11</sup> Realizing this threat exists, ships, unaccompanied by defensive air, would transit via southern Atlantic sea lanes in order

to be out of range of the Backfire. However, from bases in Norway, the unrefueled range of the Backfire bomber would be extended to also cover these southern Atlantic sea lanes.

From a maritime aspect, Norway, with its excellent harbors, is also capable of accommodating all the fleets of the world in its protected, ice-free waters.<sup>12</sup> Use of the easily defended ports and anchorages in the Norwegian fjords by the Soviet Navy would significantly increase the reaction time for their ships to enter the North Atlantic Ocean and decrease the length of their sea logistic lines to supply these ships.

Next in order of strategic significance is Sweden, the keystone nation of Scandinavia. Sweden has an impressive array of armed forces facilities for a small neutral nation. Command posts and naval installations have been built underground, and aircraft and ships are sheltered in tunnels blasted from granite. Supply dumps, power stations, factories, and other vital installations are in rock caverns, and the great majority of military equipment is manufactured domestically.<sup>13</sup> The Swedish air force deserves special note. It is one of the largest and most modern in the world, composed of more than 1,000 aircraft, including 550 combat<sup>14</sup> aircraft, mostly of Swedish design and manufacture. Many of these aircraft constantly patrol over the Baltic, and another segment is maintained on ready alert.<sup>15</sup> The invulnerability of many of these military facilities and weapons systems may deter the Soviets from attempting a surprise attack directly into Sweden.

The third nation in this fragile Scandinavian alignment is Finland. While Finnish armed forces pose no threat to the Soviet Union, they are sufficiently strong and well trained to make a conventional attack somewhat costly for the Soviets.<sup>16</sup> Yet, Finland, in Russian hands, would provide the Soviets with an occupied Nordic buffer state as a northern extension of the Warsaw Pact eastern European alignment. This would be a tempting expansion, in the traditional Soviet strategic style of protecting the homeland from "Western invasions" through buffer states.

Regarding Denmark as a Scandinavian nation, it is questionable as to whether it would be necessary for the Soviets to occupy this country in order to secure the Northwestern Region. Denmark's strategic importance, astride the narrow Danish Straits, certainly exceeds the modest size and strength of the armed forces. While the country is particularly vulnerable to amphibious assault, an attack on Denmark might be interpreted as an immediate threat to "mainland" Central



Europe and could signal Soviet intentions to expand their northern thrust beyond the immediate objective of securing only the Northwestern Region. Possession of Norway would be sufficient to give the Soviets a predominant geographic advantage in gaining quick control of the Danish Straits as the need arises. In not attacking Denmark, the Soviets would gamble that the Western powers may choose to interpret the invasion in the Northwestern Region as a limited envelopment and, therefore, decide not to come to the aid of Norway and Finland. A military response from the West would certainly escalate into a wider confrontation, involving all of the remaining European nations and the United States.

- Prevent NATO's aircraft carrier forces from entering the Norwegian Sea and attacking targets in the Kola Peninsula area with tactical aircraft. The Barents Sea, via the Norwegian Sea, offers the most geographically unconstrained operating area and the closest point of approach for carrier forces to attack the vast complex of military and industrial targets in northwestern Russia, particularly in the Kola Peninsula area. The same would be true for ships and submarines capable of launching cruise missiles. Hence, command of these seas is essential for the Soviets to protect their own northern flank. Soviet realization of this fact was indicated in their first naval maneuvers conducted on a worldwide scale, Okean 1970, where the entire task force operating in the Norwegian Sea was committed against a hostile strike force deployed to this area. The Soviet naval forces consisted of forces drawn from the Northern, Baltic, and Black Sea Fleets.<sup>17</sup> In Exercise Okean 1975, the Soviets again underscored their concern for the Northwestern Region by deploying the largest number of naval units in this area, "more than one hundred in the Baltic and the North Seas."<sup>18</sup>

- Intercept sealift forces resupplying allied forces in Europe. Next, we must recognize that the primary NATO reinforcement supply line from the United States traverses the North Sea enroute to the BENELUX countries. With hegemony over the Northwestern Region, the Soviets would derive the side benefit of access to numerous ports, particularly Norway's ice-free fjords. Those fjords would provide safe havens for their submarines to interdict North Atlantic sea lanes.<sup>19</sup> Hence, the Soviets would be in optimum position to more directly threaten the already relatively vulnerable NATO logistic lifeline. The loss of southern Norway would also mean an immediate more direct invasion route to Britain and the isolation of Belgium, Netherlands,



Denmark, and West Germany in wartime, unless logistic routes across France were possible. If the Soviets were to only occupy the Northwestern Theater, it would remain to be seen if France would feel sufficiently threatened to reopen the initial logistic route established for NATO support prior to her withdrawal from the Alliance. France may perceive that her immediate vital interests would not yet be threatened and, should the Communist-Socialist coalition win a majority in future elections, it is conceivable that their influence would prevent a French military response against the Soviets. (In a current parallel, it is interesting to note that the French Communists recently demanded an immediate halt to the French military airlift to Zaire, "warning it was unconstitutional and could involve France in a dangerous conflict." — Quote reference: *Wall Street Journal*, April 12, 1977, p. 1.)

- Protect, support, and carry out amphibious operations to other strategically important areas. Once the tactical maneuvers associated with occupying the Northwestern Region were completed and the Region secured, the Soviets would be in a more optimum position to project their amphibious and airborne power further west in other strategic roles. In the event of a full-scale war, it would be advantageous for the Soviets to control the vital land areas of Greenland, Iceland, Faeroes Islands, Shetland Islands, and Orkney Islands in order to provide protection for their naval forces entering or leaving the Atlantic Ocean. The Soviet amphibious and airborne forces are well groomed for the mission of eliminating the one definite advantage NATO now has in the north, its superior geographical position along the strategic Greenland-Iceland-United Kingdom Gap. Soviet control of the GIUK Gap would provide them excellent base locations for gaining quick access to many of the world's most vital sea lines of communication. Here, in coping with a general war situation in a strategic sense, it would be advisable for the Soviets to secure both ends of the Gap and the intervening island chain. Iceland, in particular, is key to this advantage, since from here it is possible to maintain constant three-dimensional surveillance, above, beneath, and on the surface of the Atlantic. It would also be possible from Iceland to conduct combat operations against hostile submarine and surface units, which might attempt to move into the Northwestern Region. Thus, the geographic location of this island would be of major importance in conducting warfare operations, particularly antisubmarine warfare and air operations in the surrounding waters.<sup>20</sup>

- Prevent amphibious assaults or raids against northern Russia. Lest we forget, Germany ostensibly occupied Norway (and Denmark) during World War II as a buffer against seaborne invasion of the homeland on their northern flank.<sup>21</sup> From a strictly military viewpoint, control of Norway would also be Soviet insurance against any invasion or raid against Russia on their own northern flank and protection for the vast shipbuilding and merchant marine capacity located in this area,<sup>22</sup> particularly in the Baltic, where the primary logistic support facilities for the Soviet maritime establishment are located.<sup>23</sup>

- Prevent NATO from using Scandinavian countries as forward bases for allied air and sea forces. An analysis of Soviet air capability for the MIG-21 and 23 in the Northwestern Region<sup>24</sup> indicates that allied tactical aircraft, with similar range characteristics, could launch from bases in Norway, Sweden, and Finland and strike against the huge complex of military and maritime targets in the northern parts of Russia, Poland, and East Germany. Additionally, the numerous islands and fjords of Scandinavia offer havens for small attack boats capable of operating clandestinely against Soviet naval targets. Hence, Soviet control of the water and land areas in the Northwestern Region would also prevent the use of this area for bases for allied air and sea forces to operate against Warsaw Pact targets.

- Maximize Soviet strategic ballistic missile offensive and defensive capabilities. Finally, in relating to the last Soviet objective for securing the Northwestern Region, the area lies beneath the shortest missile route between Russia and the United States. Defensive or offensive weapons located here would result in a significant strategic advantage for the Soviet Union. "Additional warning time, improved accuracy to targets, defensive missile screens and tracking stations, launching sites external to mother Russia, reduced missile flight distances with greater payloads, and greater dispersion are among the favorable factors which the Northwestern Region affords the occupying power."<sup>25</sup>

### UNDERLYING SOVIET REASONS

There are other less obvious reasons which may entice the Soviets to initiate limited hostilities in the Northwestern Region independent of actions on the Central Front of Europe or into the Southern Flank of NATO. The limited, remote area attack scenario in the north appears to represent a credible Soviet action from several standpoints.

- "Vulnerabilities on NATO's Northern Flank derive not only from



the threat, but also from the absence of geographic cohesion, a logically integrated defense concept, and inadequacy of specific force commitments and resources."<sup>26</sup> In part, these deficiencies stem from a lack of intraregional cooperation among Nordic countries in political, economic, and military affairs.<sup>27</sup> They may also be attributable to a limited extraregional presence on the part of the United States and other NATO nations by virtue of regional political realities. However, the fact that we are currently over-enamored with Central Europe may be contributing to the problem, which would tempt the Soviets to take advantage of our tunnel vision on the Central Front. An attack here in the north probably would not be blunted in an immediate sense as it might be on the Central Front. This is also the area where Soviet naval forces can best be brought to bear in accomplishing a quick takeover. Hence, here in the Northwestern Region, the Soviets might believe they could avoid the military and political risks associated with the possibility of a protracted confrontation in Central Europe.

- While the internal political situations in the Nordic countries are far from optimum, relatively speaking they are models of stability when compared to the disarray which exists along NATO's Southern Flank. The political and economic instability of the NATO countries of the Mediterranean littoral, particularly Greece, Turkey, and Italy, stand in marked contrast to the relative durability of those governed by democratic systems in the Northwestern Region. Thus, the Soviets may perceive that NATO's Southern Flank will eventually crumble without any military action on their part, while the Northwestern Region may require more drastic measures in order to alter the Nordic power balance in their favor.

- Here also in the Northwestern Region, the Soviets would have no face-to-face confrontation with US forces that would result in an immediate response on the part of our military. No extra-regional NATO ground forces are located in this area<sup>28</sup> because of regional political considerations. Additionally, deployment of NATO naval forces to this area is extremely limited, essentially reactive deployments instead of continual presence, primarily because the region is given a low priority compared with other areas, such as East Asia and the Mediterranean.<sup>29</sup> The considerable transit time, 2,500 miles distant from the major America-Europe reinforcement and resupply sea routes,<sup>30</sup> would inhibit a rapid US naval response to a Soviet attack in the Northwestern Region. It would require 8 to 10 days to deploy a carrier task force to the Norwegian Sea from bases on the eastern

seaboard.<sup>31</sup> Further, airfields capable of handling US airlift aircraft would likely be seized immediately upon a Soviet thrust into the region, thereby preventing the United States from landing troops to militarily or politically impede the Soviet advance. The key consideration here, then, is whether NATO, and primarily the United States, would be able to achieve a presence in this area, which lies the furthest distance from US naval power, prior to the Soviets gaining control of this region. Considering the distances involved and the lack of a continuous NATO naval presence, it is unlikely the West could respond in a credible or timely manner.

- More important than evading a face-to-face confrontation with US troops, during a Soviet thrust into the Northwestern Region, is the avoidance of NATO tactical nuclear weapons. There are no regionally based nuclear weapons to be immediately encountered in a thrust into the Northwestern Region.<sup>32</sup> Therefore, the Soviets may perceive there would be no risk that the situation in this region would escalate to the level of a general nuclear war as quickly as it would on the Central Front,<sup>33</sup> at least prior to the time that the occupation of the Northwestern Region was completed and they were in a position to cease hostilities.

- While a surprise attack against the Central Front by the Warsaw Pact land forces could be launched with little warning,<sup>34</sup> prudence would dictate that such a move would have to be accompanied by a massive movement of Soviet naval forces to open seas, and particularly into the mid-Atlantic Ocean, 8-10 days in advance of the ground thrust. If this did not occur, ships and submarines of the Northern Fleet, which is the largest Soviet fleet, might be trapped north of the Greenland-Iceland-United Kingdom Gap by allied naval forces establishing a barrier at this strategic choke point shortly after the initiation of hostilities in Central Europe. Ships and submarines of the Baltic Fleet, which is the second largest Soviet fleet, would also likely be isolated in the Baltic Sea by mines implanted in the Danish Straits. Realizing that this situation somewhat compromises the concept of a blitzkrieg style surprise attack (unless under the disguise of a massive fleet exercise), the Soviets might be reluctant to telegraph their intent in Central Europe with such high lead time advance deployments of the bulk of the Northern and Baltic Fleets. However, a thrust into the Northwestern Region would not require the same advance fleet deployment measures necessary to support an attack into Central Europe. Here the Soviets have optimum air cover for their naval forces.



Under the disguise of fleet exercises or from a standing start, the main combat ships of the Soviet Northern and Baltic Fleets, under protective air cover, would be in ideal position in two days to support a thrust into the Northwestern Region. For Northern Fleet ships underway at 30 knots, the 1,469 nautical miles between Murmansk and Oslo, Norway<sup>35</sup> can be traversed in 49 hours. Ships of the Baltic Fleet can complete the encirclement and move from Leningrad to Oslo in the same time, considering the 960 nautical miles distance<sup>36</sup> would be covered at slower speeds, averaging about 20 knots, while in the more confined waters of the Baltic Sea. From the allied viewpoint, the actual destination of the Soviet ships would not be known, and the movement might be interpreted as massive naval support for an attack on the Central Front. Having diverted their resources for an anticipated attack into Central Europe, the allies would find themselves on the short end in Scandinavia. Once the Soviets had consolidated their gains in the Northwestern Region and the situation had stabilized, they would then be in optimum position to project their naval and air power from bases in Norway into the mid-Atlantic in about half the time it would take from Murmansk. An eventual attack into Central Europe could, therefore, be accomplished with less warning time, particularly from a naval aspect.

- In 1976, Norway started exporting oil for the first time. Peak production is expected by 1980.<sup>37</sup> At this time, Western Europe's dependency upon the Middle East for oil will decrease considerably.<sup>38</sup> North Sea oil could provide twice the oil needed for NATO military operations by 1980.<sup>39</sup> Norway (specifically Norwegian North Sea oil rigs) under Soviet domination would be a severe economic blow to Western Europe, which would also directly affect NATO's war-fighting ability.

- Norway's merchant marine is also a considerable asset to NATO. Gross tonnage is in excess of 44.7 million dead weight tons, ranking fourth among world powers.<sup>40</sup> That portion of the Norwegian merchant fleet that would be captured in port by the Soviets would not be available to NATO for wartime contingency sealift purposes.

- Soviet forces receive intense cold weather training and have weapons systems specifically designed for operations in arctic climate.<sup>41</sup> Additionally, Soviet naval forces have more arctic expertise than US naval forces.<sup>42</sup> In cold weather climatic conditions, it might generally be conceded that the Soviets would have a great advantage in the Northwestern Region if the attack would occur during the winter

months. If this were the case, the allies may be extremely reluctant to challenge the Russians when they are operating within their natural element.

### HYPOTHETICAL PLAN OF ATTACK

An examination of the geography and demography of the Northwestern Region indicates that any Soviet plan of attack would probably have fairly deep territorial objectives and involve the use of regional land, sea, and air forces of Russia, East Germany, and Poland. The use of the forces of these other Warsaw Pact Baltic powers would lend a degree of "legitimacy" to an attack into the Northwestern Region by involving non-Soviet national forces in a combined effort against the "common threat" on their northern frontiers. Such a combined effort would also be in keeping with "Soviet doctrine, which, while emphasizing surprise and deception in order to win the initiative, also insists on the launching of such an attack with superiority of all-arms force and substantial reserve."<sup>43</sup> Initially, as part of such an attack, the North Cape area of Norway, which curves over northern Sweden and Finland and accounts for Norway's short border with the USSR, would likely be outflanked by amphibious landings to neutralize coastal defenses in Norway from Narvik south. An accompanying land movement would probably be made through northern Finland to Narvik.<sup>44</sup> Soviet airborne forces would likely be landed at key airfields in major cities and ports along the coasts of Norway and Finland to secure vital ship and air communications facilities and deny their use for NATO reinforcement. Warsaw Pact amphibious landings may also play a major role in the attack, particularly along the Baltic littoral. Their role would be to seize major islands and ports, or take objectives ahead of the advancing ground forces.

While Soviet naval infantry and airborne units will operate against Norway, together with ground units from the Leningrad-Kola area, the Baltic effort would feature combined and/or independently conducted amphibious assaults by specially trained Soviet, Polish, and East German amphibious (and airborne) formations. . . . Landings can be relatively small in scale—of battalion size or less—but may also consist of two or more battalions, as well as motorized rifle units used as a follow-up force or even in an initial assault role.<sup>45</sup>

Soviet naval infantry may be assigned multiple missions as in past exercises and, if required, withdrawn from secured objectives and

recommitted immediately to other Baltic areas.<sup>46</sup> Additionally, Pact air forces will probably be used to attain air superiority and for close air support. Presumably a primary mission of Pact naval and air forces would be to prevent any Allied attempt to mine the Danish Straits to impede the movement of Soviet ships and amphibious forces.

It would be to the Soviet advantage to complete the entire operation with minimum exchange of fire in as low key manner as possible. In order to promote Allied uncertainty and indecision, the Soviets could, concurrent with the armed attack, proclaim to the Western nations that this action is being taken on a limited basis within the confines of the Northwestern Region, with no intention of invading Central Europe or Sweden for further territorial gains. The announced reasons for the attack might be: (1) to assure that the Northwestern Region is not used in any manner inimical to Warsaw Pact security interests; (2) to assure "secure" and extended Warsaw Pact maritime frontiers along their northern border; (3) to provide adequate territory along the Soviet northwestern frontier for greater "defense in depth;" and (4) to assure a nuclear "free zone" in the north (a previous Soviet plan revived in 1975.)<sup>47</sup> The Soviets would be gambling that the Central European nations may not immediately unify for a credible military response, in conjunction with the United States, until after Pact territorial gains were consolidated. Then, it would probably be too late, considering the overwhelming superiority of Warsaw Pact forces occupying the Region.

#### MEANS OF REGAINING THE REGIONAL BALANCE

There are certain political, economic, and military moves possible on the part of the Western nations which, in a deterrence sense, may assist in regaining the regional balance to offset recent Soviet military quantitative gains in the area.

Politically, the NATO decision mechanisms during times of tension or anticipated attack must be upheld (and preferably streamlined) in order to neutralize the Soviet numerical advantage and exploit the natural geographical advantages we have in Scandinavia.<sup>48</sup> This is especially true in the Baltic Sea, where a belated decision to mine the Danish Straits would result in the Soviet fleet having unimpeded freedom to complete the encirclement of Norway and Finland on their southern flank. This time factor involved in the politico-military decisionmaking not only applies to mining decisions, but equally well to deployment of forces to battle positions, including general



mobilization and early request for reinforcements. In this regard it is important to recall that the cornerstone of NATO's deterrence strategy in Scandinavia is "reinforcement."<sup>49</sup> It would also be wise to often reaffirm the basic premise of NATO that any attack upon the territory of a member of the Alliance shall be deemed an attack upon all members.<sup>50</sup> Specifically, it should be emphasized that this applies equally as well in the case of Norway, despite its near proximity to the USSR and the fact that it is slowly being engulfed within the preponderant naval sphere of influence of the Soviets. Additionally, the United States and NATO should more firmly support the roles of the Nordic countries and their contributions to the regional balance, to include:

(1) For Norway (and Denmark): a willingness to station NATO forces and nuclear weapons on Norwegian (and Danish) territory, if requested. (2) For Finland: an absolute respect for Finnish neutrality and for an understanding of Finnish pronouncements which perforce support for Soviet policies on occasion. (3) For Sweden: a respect for Sweden's nonalignment which serves as the fulcrum for Nordic balance because of Sweden's central geographical and political position between NATO Denmark and Norway and neutral Finland ...<sup>51</sup>

In order to politically reinforce the importance of Norway to NATO, it would also be appropriate to realign and rename the GIUK Gap to establish Norway as the eastern terminus (G-I-UK-NOR Gap).

In the area of economic moves, the development of Norway's oil resources in the North Sea tend to link her more closely with the European economic community, particularly Britain and West Germany.<sup>52</sup> This results in greater Central European economic dependence on Norway than in the past. This factor should be emphasized, with the implications of increased security measures on the part of NATO in favor of Norway. Further north, the Svalbard Archipelago, under the terms of the 1920 Paris Treaty, provides the United States with a means of increasing our economic presence in the area. We have reserved the right to exploit the natural resources of the Archipelago under the terms of the Paris Treaty,<sup>53</sup> and perhaps this is now the time to take advantage of that right. Our presence in the Norwegian territory may moderate any Soviet designs against mainland Norway.

Militarily, there is a need for an increased Western naval presence in the Region. "Such a Western navy would continuously be able, in

response to any worldwide Soviet attempt of power demonstration, to pose a threat to the Soviet maritime influence in the part of the world's oceans where Soviet naval presence is greatest and most important for the Soviet Union herself—in the Northeast Atlantic.”<sup>54</sup> Considering the political and distance factors which inhibit rapid allied reinforcement of the NATO Northern Flank, it would seem prudent to permanently deploy “counter pre-emptive” forces in the area. These forces would be ships of the West German Navy,<sup>55</sup> or, perhaps more politically sound, Standing NATO Naval Forces for the Baltic and Norwegian Seas. The concept of these naval forces would be similar to the existing commands of NATO's Standing Naval Force Atlantic and Standing Naval Force Channel. In the Norwegian Sea, this force might consist of US, British, Danish, and Norwegian ships. In the Baltic, force representation could include ships from the United States, West Germany, Norway, and Denmark. These NATO naval commands, while somewhat outnumbered in terms of Warsaw Pact opposing forces, would at least enhance the deterrence concept inherent in naval presence in the area while, at the same time, demonstrating increased NATO unity.<sup>56</sup>

Although the obstacles to prepositioning of men and equipment are formidable, there is a commanding case for looking anew at this concept.<sup>57</sup> “Norwegian defense authorities have initiated military staff talks with the United States, Britain, and Canada aimed at stockpiling allied military equipment in Norway for defense of NATO's strategic northern flank.”<sup>58</sup> While the Soviets have taken an affront to this move, the Norwegians have cited the steady and massive buildup of Soviet forces as justification for similar reinforcement by NATO. The prepositioning of at least military equipment would be a significant step in improving NATO's defense posture, since Norway's own capabilities are limited by manpower and resources.<sup>59</sup> The reinforcements to man this stockpiled equipment could be more readily available by increasing the presence of NATO marine forces afloat in the Norwegian and Baltic Seas, perhaps as task group elements of the proposed NATO Standing Naval Forces Norwegian and Baltic Seas. Another alternative is to increase the flexibility and commitment of the Allied Command Europe Mobile Force to the northern flank with access to this prepositioned equipment. These measures would be more politically acceptable to the Nordic nations and less provocative to the Soviets, since they do not result in an increased NATO presence ashore in Scandinavian territory.

## CONCLUSION

The resolution of the security problem on NATO's Northern Flank is essentially a naval issue. The political, economic, and military considerations all have maritime connotations and are interwoven within the naval geography of the area. When one considered the *political* sensitivity of increasing Western presence in the area, particularly the implications of stationing troops ashore in the area versus keeping them afloat; the regional *economic* exploitation associated with insular resources and offshore oil exploration; and the geostrategic situation which is *militarily* oriented in a naval sense, one must also conclude that NATO's response should come primarily from afloat. Otherwise, NATO will have abrogated its responsibilities in this area to the comfort of the Russians, who, perceiving our disinterest, will eventually be tempted to overrun the Northwestern Region at their own convenience.



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20. ABSTRACT (CONTINUED)

cont → In pursuit of the above objectives, the Soviets are expanding their area of influence farther westward from the naval bases of the Baltic and Barents Seas to the forward defense line of Western naval strategy in the North Atlantic, the strategic Greenland-Iceland-United Kingdom gap. This expansion of Soviet naval jurisdiction, by flanking movements through the Barents, Norwegian, Baltic, and North Seas, may eventually be intended to isolate the Nordic region from Western influence and eradicate NATO's Northern Flank. These maneuvers may also portend an eventual Soviet military move to occupy the Nordic region through naval encirclement and airborne and amphibious landings to occupy key terrain, military installations, airfields, and sea-ports.

This Soviet incursion into the Nordic region may be undertaken independent of any action against NATO's Central Front and could be advertised "as a limited invasion to provide the Soviets with a 'Nordic Buffer Zone' as an extension of the Warsaw Pact eastern European alignment, with no further territorial ambitions against Central Europe." Such an alteration of the Nordic balance would provide the Soviets the peripheral advantage of access to the harbors, airfields, and strategic geography of Scandinavia in order to project both their strategic and conventional forces further westward to immediately threaten NATO's logistic lifelines and North Sea oil and further decrease the warning time factor for an eventual thrust into Central Europe.

→ The NATO Alliance must recognize that the resolution of the security problems along the Northern Flank may essentially be a naval issue. The political, economic, military, and geographic considerations all have naval implications. Hence, one could conclude that NATO's response should come primarily from afloat.

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